

Barton (W.P.C.)

AUDI ALTERAM PARTEM.

9

A

POLEMICAL REMONSTRANCE  
AGAINST THE PROJECT OF CREATING THE NEW OFFICE  
OF  
SURGEON GENERAL

IN THE  
NAVY OF THE UNITED STATES;

ADDRESSED TO

The Honourable WILLIAM C. RIVES, *Chairman*,

“ SAMUEL L. SOUTHARD,  
“ N. P. TALMADGE,  
“ ALFRED CUTHBERT,  
“ RUEL WILLIAMS, } *Members*

*Of the Committee on Naval Affairs of the Senate of the United States.*

AND TO

The Honourable SAMUEL INGHAM, *Chairman*,

“ I. I. MILLIGEN,  
“ JOHN REED,  
“ HENRY A. WISE,  
“ SEATON GRANTLAND,  
“ ELY MOORE,  
“ DANIEL KILGORE,  
“ LEMUEL PAYNTER,  
“ HUGH J. ANDERSON, } *Members*

*Of the Committee on Naval Affairs of the House of Representatives of the United States.*

BY

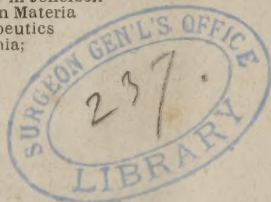
WILLIAM P. C. BARTON, M. D.

A SENIOR SURGEON IN THE UNITED STATES' NAVY;

Corresponding Member of the Imperial and Royal Academy of Agriculture of Florence;  
Member of the Linnean Society of Stockholm; formerly Physician to the Army  
in the Fourth Military District; late Professor of Botany in the University  
of Pennsylvania, and of Materia Medica and Botany in Jefferson  
Medical College of Philadelphia; now Lecturer on Materia  
Medica, Botany, Toxicology, and Naval Therapeutics  
in the Therapeutic Institute of Philadelphia;  
late Surgeon of the U. S. Naval Hospital  
at Norfolk, Va., and now Surgeon of  
the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

PHILADELPHIA:

1838.



68-6 no. 7

## PREFACE.

---

EARLY attached to allegorical writing, from a belief in the forcible light in which it may be made to present things and realities, it has been indulged in in the following Introduction, with the avowed design of conveying instruction with interest, if not amusement, for those who may be edified by the one and may like to have their attention excited by the other. But legislators require not instruction on grave matters by such a mean, nor would it be at all becoming to approach them in that light way. They require facts and reasoning prior to action for or against any project. They, therefore, for whom the remonstrance was written, may enter on the polemical portion, destined especially for their information, and pass over the lighter thoughts of the

## INTRODUCTION.

---

IF I were to address any thing on the subject of this remonstrance to the medical officers of the navy generally, I would do so in the language in which Æsop harangued the Athenians, when they complained of the empire over their destinies held by Pisistratus, "be contented with your present condition, bad as you think it, for fear a change would be for the worse." It might, however, require the power of appeasing murmurs and desire of change, which history attributes to that famed Roman consul, Meninius Agrippa, to propitiate to inaction on the subject, those of our corps who believe in cause of complaint and in the sufficiency of the proposed remedy.



There is little use, and less wisdom, in perpetually striving to distribute the discontent one feels as an individual of a community of any kind, amidst those not so querulous as ourselves. Evils at present tolerable, may be rendered insupportable by unnecessary complaints of their severity; and unfinished discomfiture will not unfrequently be consummated by restless pruriency to escape from its effects.

Those who would appease what they would fain intimate as general discontent, would do well to ascertain how much of it originates purely within themselves. It is true this is difficult for the restive to do: fidgety themselves, they imagine the same temperament belongs to others. He who would bear his shackles lightly, should not shake them. Not only would the noise this act would produce remind him of his bonds, but would announce to others that he wears them. The restless never, consequently, amend their condition by complaints of individual grievance, or by fostering a belief that these are equally the grievances of others. Inconveniences neither very troublesome nor insupportable to the majority, may, by creating a pandemic attempt to foist them before the public and remove them, recoil in augmented severity by the belief that the evils must be intense, since a stir to put them aside has spontaneously arisen, when in fact, the excitement has had its origin in our own "agitations." An anecdote of a Gascon is apposite to this truth. Let me relate it: He started on a morning's ride on a main road variously intersected with short cuts and bye paths. Accosted by the first person he met, with "bon jour, y-at-il des nouvelles?" returning the salutation he replied, with a desire to tell something strange, "Hélas mon ami, de mauvaises nouvelles; le pont de pierre ici près a été remporté par le déluge d'hier-au-soir." "Mon Dieu quel malheur!" rejoined the other, in amazement, and passed on, leaving his informant chuckling at the groundless consternation he had excited, and determined to reiterate the joke with all he met, who had to cross the bridge to reach their goal. This he did several times, with always the effect of creating amazement and *Mon Dieu* ejaculations. It so happened that the first traveller had not been destined to cross the bridge, but to take a circuitous retrograde path, which soon brought him again ahead of the Gascon, having, however, in his way learned that there was no foundation for the story. Meeting him again, and being unrecognized, he determined to reciprocate the jest:

“Bon jour, mon ami,” said he, “avez vous oui dire le désastre qui est arrivé?” “Non; qu’est que c’est?” “Ah, Mon Dieu! le pont de pierre ici près a été remporté par le déluge d’hier-au-soir.” The Gascon, equally credulous and mendacious, like his people, rejoined, in utter amazement, “Quoi! c’est donc vrai?” and he quickly rode away, ejaculating to himself “Parbleu! je croyais que c’était un conte de ma propre invention!” This anecdote is related to show, metaphorically, how readily those lose sight of the origin of a question involving the interests of many, who impart wrong impressions too hastily as correct, and by mixing with the crowd and hearing them again, an idea of general belief is created, in what was first started by an individual, or a few. The impression thus becoming apparently general, we scarce recollect our agency in starting it. I have thus allegorically accounted for the fact that any number, however small, should have joined in the belief of “injury and detriment,” when I think nothing of the kind complained of exists. The very paucity of this number, and the long series of years which have passed by, witnessing gradual and substantial improvement in the Department where reform is urged, (and by means too—irrational and impracticable)—ought to be sufficient evidence of the inexpediency of experiments. “Let well alone” is a wise saw, and there is a beautiful and instructive lesson conveyed in that pithy epitaph, so often quoted for its unique brevity and copious meaning: *“I was well; I would be better, and here I lie.”*

If there be serious exigency for reform, we ought to be wary of the means suggested to produce it. Any crude or inefficient scheme would not leave affairs as they were, but enhance their inconvenience by failure. The medical officers of the navy may be brought to a realization of these axioms, by what I deem the ill-judged course some of them have been pursuing and are still following up, in relation to the affair which has called forth this remonstrance. There is, in my opinion, a want of the spirit of generalization in the estimate such make of the nature, extent and inseparable difficulties of public service. The gubernatorial charge of the naval service is no easy one, nor one of unity. Diverse and distracting views are continually presented, and the Secretary of the Navy who assumes that governing charge with the desire, or wish, or intention to please every one, must soon see the pith and realize in himself that beautiful fable of Phæ-



drus,\* which gives so true a moral of various-minded, discontented man. Impatience in the governed, of inconveniences or evils, either imaginary, or comparatively trivial, with others which might arise out of the very experimental means they propose as corrective, is not only unwise, but futile.

I feel entirely satisfied in my own mind, that no corrective would follow the institution of the proposed office. A syntonic disharmony would, ere long, pervade the corps, and intense heart-burnings burst out. The medical corps may be likened to that peculiar instrument of music, the piano-forte, which contains one imperfect note, inscrutably refractory: it is insusceptible of change or dominion: producing a sound somewhat resembling the distant howling or subdued cry of the wolf, it is technically called the *wolf* of the diatonic scale of that instrument.† Hitherto inscrutable, the musical world has settled down into the expediency of reconciling the ear to the mystic disharmony of this unapproachable, and of course unchangeable fault. This is skilfully done by distributing the imperfection among the *fifths* of the whole scale, and is effected by apportioning a little on this note, which by its quality bears but little, more upon that which, by its strength or quality tolerates more, until the unharmonious wolf ceases to howl, and is so well got rid of that the most sensitive ear can be reconciled to the nearly inaudible intrusion.

What I deem the irremediable imperfection of our corps, and its relationship to that functionary who attunes it to discipline, and harmony, and action, is mystically conveyed in this musical allegory. The Naval Medical Department, as an instrument of the integral service, is, perhaps, susceptible of improved tone and a more spirited action; but it is, and ever must remain, inherently

\* Also, "The man, his son and his ass:"—the man who strove to please every one in vain, and determined therefore to please himself.

† And also of the organ, in which it is in some keys absolutely indomitable, and hence they are impracticable for harmony.

"This hideous noise, called the wolf, bearing some resemblance to the howl of that animal."—*Gardiner's Music of Nature*, p. 437.

The personal labors and skill of the Earl of Stanhope, those arising from his patronage, and those of all learned and scientific musicians and their united acumen, have been in vain expended to render the instrument perfect by removing this only cause of its imperfection.

imperfect.\* It may, however, be brought into as perfect tune as, in the nature of things, can be accomplished. If the distant and subdued cry, (it has not ever been a ferocious and alarming howl,) for a Surgeon General shall at any time be heard—that cry is the *wolf* of the scale (or corps.) If it cannot be wholly obliterated it may be sufficiently and harmoniously reconciled to suit the nicest sensibility, by dividing the cacophonous murmur, and the oppressive “detriment” engendering it, on several notes of the whole scale: in the language of music, on the *fifths* of all the diapasons. To drop the trope; on each of the Five Senior Surgeons of the Navy in Board assembled let the labor fall, of obtunding any existing difficulty to its perfect organization. Such a course would be devoid of irrational experiment, because reason and experience conspire in its favor: or if in any degree experimental, it would not be by instituting a novel office. Should this course fail to answer the expected end, no odium or regret could arise.

Not so with the proposed remedy. If adopted, its existence would be as transient as that of the “Medical Bureau” was. It required no prescience to foretell the downfall of that evanescent humbug. Neither need the oracles of Delphi be consulted, to predict that this one would be equally transitory. It would not be requisite to have a string of spectators of its rise and fall, like the host of Xerxes, which the Grecians described as so numerous and wide-spreading that one extremity could see the sun rise and the other end see him set, at the same instant. The rise of the sun of the Surgeon General’s glory, and his setting, would be seen from one point, or with no greater host intervening betwixt the point of sight of assurgence and declension, than would be included between the Senior Surgeon of the Navy and the youngest assistant on the list.

Should this dynamic office be created, with all its speciously pro-

---

\* Take it as a corps, it is at this moment a well educated, practical and useful body of medical men. It must remain so, and even become in future more enlightened, as long as the Examining Boards of Surgeons do their duty—a duty which should ever be considered by conscientious men, one admitting no conventional decisions in passing candidates, either for admission or promotion—one comprising the singleness of deliberation and action, which arises from the simple view of *fitness* in all respects, for the peculiar sphere of operations appertaining to the inherent nature of naval service.



jected utilities, it and its incumbent will soon soar\* like the balloonist, by inflation and the levity of the air within, to a great height. On its first rising, the community would gaze at it in wonderment—commend the boldness of the aeronaut who could venture to ascend in so fragile and unsubstantial a machine. He will soar still higher and higher, until he shall become dimly seen in reduced dimensions, and will finally be lost sight of, obscured from vision—instruments, advantages, life preserving apparatus and all—in clouds of disappointment. The gazers would disperse and he not be heard of again until we should learn by the public prints that he had precipitately descended, after many and precarious attempts to direct his balloon on a straight course in his aerial voyage, at a place of landing *far distant from his rise*, or perhaps that he shall have met with injuries, or loss of property or life, in the venturesome feat. The sober part of the community would not wonder at his temerity, for man is a venturesome being, but would be amazed that he should have expended it on a feat productive of no good, which could only have made us acquainted with the nature of an atmosphere, and its temperature, which we can never be exposed to, and are not destined to breathe.

In musical compositions of any pretension, there is an *andante* or slow movement, or an *adagio* still slower, often of great expression and meaning; an *allegro* or quick movement, which for the most part is *presto* towards and *prestissimo* at the end, and lastly a *finale*, which is the finishing strain. Our Navy is forty years old; its medical department cotemporaneous in date. This Navy, as a whole, inclusive of all its departments, has made good music,

---

\* This would suit me exactly, for I have all my life had an almost irrepressible desire to ascend in a balloon. Nothing but the positive fear of a tumble out of it has prevented my doing so. There is something so buoyant and ambition-stirring in the idea of rising above all mankind, and skimming through the clouds of heaven, fearlessly approaching the sun and looking him in his very face, to see if he wear an ursine beard and moustaches!—but then the tumble!!—so many chances of it!!!—ah, there's the rub!!!! But to be serious—*quite serious*: should congress establish the office in question, which ITS WISDOM FOREFEND, now or at any future time, I make no secret that I should claim it in case my only senior should, from any cause, decline it. Under that gentleman I would willingly serve—he is 'the noblest work of God'—an honest man—he is, too, a good, and a worthy, and a venerable man—and is *my senior*.

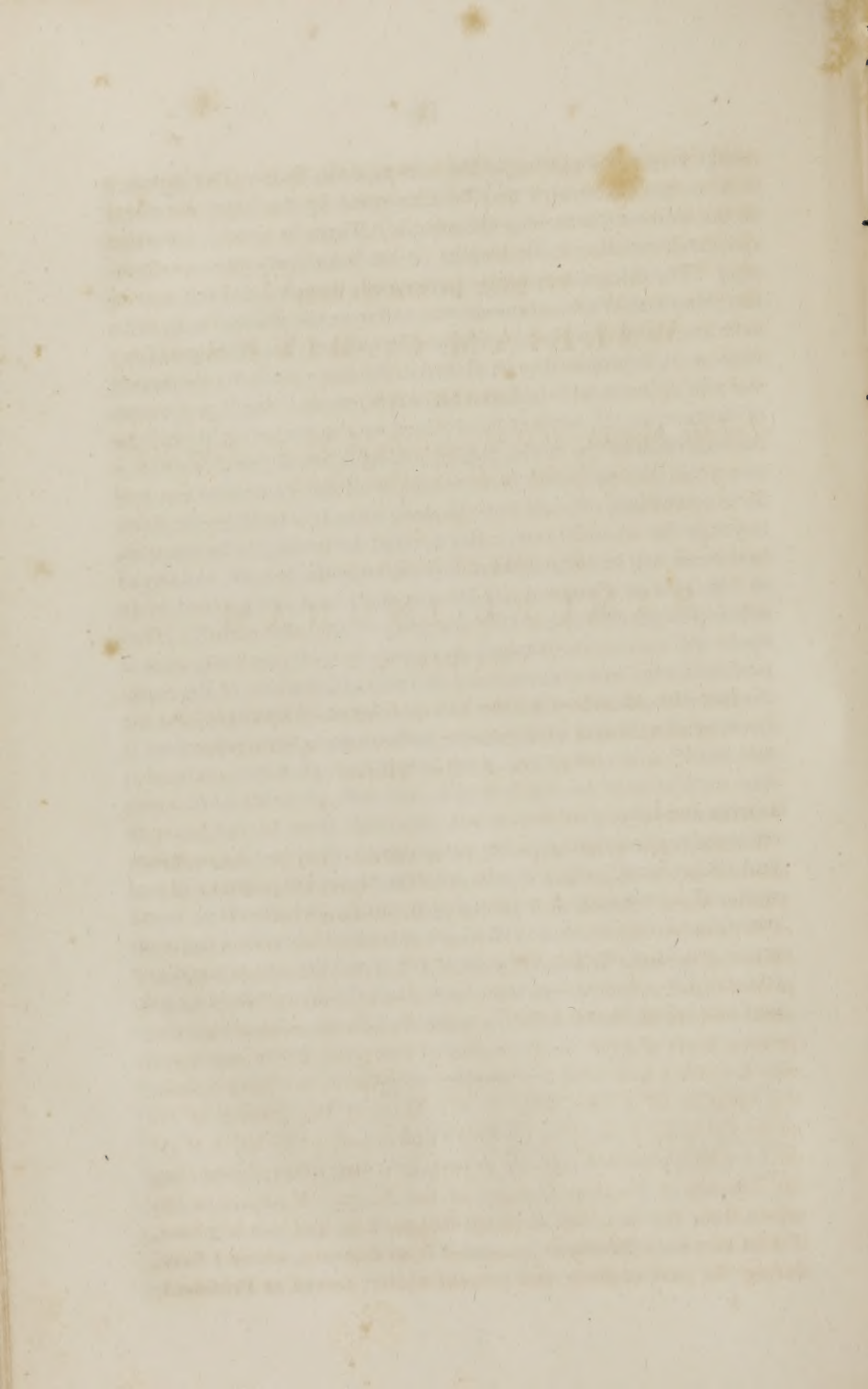


though somewhat grating to the ears of John Bull. The approach to a surgeon-generalcy may be illustrated by the slow movement of the slowest character—the adagio. There is much expression and much meaning in its length; (it has been forty years performing.) The allegro was partly performed, though I did not hear it, last winter at Washington—it was, as far as the *presto*, continued a month ago, and now the *prestissimo*, the quickest possible time of any movement, is proposed to be played in the same place, for the benefit “of one of the most intelligent and experienced senior” performers of our corps. If consent be obtained to the execution (it will be the execution of the pride, energy and ambition of the corps with a surety) of this proposed performance, still the consummation will be to come after. It will not “be done when it is done”—the *finale* is yet in the womb of fate. But without pretending to be oracular, that *finale* will be lugubrious in feeling, regretful in tone, and forced on the ears of Congress, by the necessity that enlightened body will feel of consenting to the finishing of the “concerto.” That finale will be the abolishment, at a proximate future time, after a profitless trial, and at the earnest entreaty of the whole of the medical corps in concert—the office now petitioned for by a few. As the novel-reading world ever inquires before one is hanseled, “does it end well?” and abandons it, even if half through, when informed it does not, it may be worth while, and will probably save much trouble and time, if all concerned, especially those having power to achieve its execution, who are propitiated to that end by sophistry and “false facts,” will consider whether *this novel* project will end well. If I have made it certain that it will not, whether it be worth while, for the sake of getting at the *moral*, which even a bad ending *in works of fancy* is often contrived to exhibit—to proceed any farther in it. In the language of the East, I may conclude by asking, “What more can I say?”

---

#### ERRATUM.

Page 23, line fifteen from the bottom, for “supervisory” read “*super-vising*.”





TO THE HONOURABLE  
WILLIAM C. RIVES,

CHAIRMAN,

*And the Members of the Committee on Naval Affairs of the  
Senate of the United States;*

AND

TO THE HONOURABLE  
SAMUEL INGHAM,

CHAIRMAN,

*And the Members of the Committee on Naval Affairs  
of the House of Representatives of the Congress  
of the United States.*

GENTLEMEN—

I take leave most respectfully to address you in your official attitude as chairmen and members of the Naval Committees of the United States' Senate and House of Representatives.

Within two days past I have received information from a medical officer of the navy at Washington, of a fact that has created my surprise—that the Honourable Senator Rives, chairman of the Senate's naval committee, has received a printed petition, accompanied by a printed draft of a bill for the action of Congress, to the end that it may become a law—the one craving, on grounds set forth therein, the creation of a new office in the Medical Department of the navy: the other presenting the grave and important dictation of the duties which prospectively are to pertain to that office, designating the incumbent Surgeon General of the Navy. My surprise has arisen from the fact, that although this petition and this bill have, if I be correctly informed, emanated from this city, where I have, during the past summer and present winter, served as President,

with the surgeons on duty, and others of city and vicinal residence, in two long sessions of two Boards of Examination, I have never heard one syllable of the contemplated project, directly nor indirectly—was not consulted on the subject, and, in a word, knew nothing whatever of any movement in the matter at any time previous to the 12th inst. Last spring, after the adjournment of Congress, I had the first intimation that, during the preceding session, some such attempt had been made, of which, if any were essayed, I did not *then* either know any thing, nor was I *then* applied to for my sentiments on this novel project.

Thus ignorant of the contemplation of a most serious movement, as well as of the inceptive action recently had upon it with his Excellency the President, with the Honourable the Secretary of the Navy, with your committees, and with others concerned in the navy, I had only the alternative course left me, of supinely acquiescing without being heard in favour or against a scheme which was so materially to affect my own official situation as the oldest surgeon in the navy save one; or to seek the channel of epistolary address to the Secretary of the Navy. This I did, and placed with him, officially, not only my hearty dissent from the necessity, utility, propriety, or expediency of creating such an unprecedented and anomalous naval office, but communicated the opinions on which that dissent was based. I appealed to him with all the energy of facts against its propriety or necessity, and craved his prompt opposition to any such project. I regret to differ with such of my colleagues as have given their countenance to realize this strange plan, by believing it not only ill judged in the aspect of usefulness, much less necessity; but, to my conception of the subject in *all* its bearings, exceedingly ill devised, crude, and imperfect, even as respects the ends proposed to be achieved; and one, moreover, if it should on this precipitate, impugned petition, be accomplished—fraught with injustice, discontent, dissention and mischief.

I have considered it just to myself to trouble you with these introductory remarks, apologetically for intruding my sentiments on your notice at all. The advanced attitude of the project being a surreption, as regards my own knowledge of it; and feeling the energies of my mind, such as they are, deeply interested and heretofore actively exercised by my publications and suggestive communications to the Navy Department, in the promotion of the respectability, reputation, and usefulness of the Medical Department of the



navy, I could not remain silent. The scheme is susceptible of irrefragible proofs, not only of anomaly and inexpediency, but of positive inutility. It is especially characterized, in my view of the subject, by inherent evidences of illusory and sophistic reasoning. I think the sequences contemplated are strikingly at variance with any feasible or probable issue. Whether I be sustained in these sentiments by sufficient strength in the ratiocination by which my objections and opposition will be presented to you in this communication, will be for you to judge. Without further delay, therefore, I proceed to analyse the groundwork of the projected bill, namely, the petition, and also the bill itself.

The inceptive argument of this petition is, that "great inconvenience and detriment arise in the Medical Department of the Naval Service, for want of a careful superintendence of its interests, by the institution of the office of Surgeon General of the Navy."

First, the position is not only nakedly assertive, but positively and without qualification gratuitous. For admitting *argumenti causa*, (and for the present only so,) the assertive premise, the inductive conclusion is not only an actual postulate, but easily shown to be nugatory. That it is a postulate is evinced by the fact, that as there is no navy in the world in which the office of Surgeon General with such duties and objects exists, or ever did exist, there is no evidence nor precedent of the beneficial result or the salutary effect of such an office centred in an individual,—none of its having in any other navy prevented such "great inconvenience and detriment in its Medical Department." Such an office being without Naval precedent therefore, would clearly be experimental as regards any corrective influence of the "great inconvenience and detriment" complained of. And further, as the assertions of the third paragraph of the petition declare, that while in our navy "communications on medical topics" from our medical naval officers "are generally thrown aside at the Navy Department as useless," because there is "no person who in his official capacity is charged with the reception" of them; "while with other civilized nations, such records are carefully consigned to the keeping and supervision of able professional men, and made to confer honour upon their authors, as well as being rendered useful to the world by the diffusion of knowledge and the promotion of science,"—it is evident that the proposed experiment of an *individual* corrective officer is not the proper one, while an office of plurality would be so.

For admitting these positions (of third paragraph) to be tenable in fact, (which *argumenti causa* again I will do,) it is clear that the scrupulous curatorship, and supervision of these records, which “have been made to confer honour on their authors,” “rendered useful to the world by the diffusion of knowledge and promotion of science,” have not been exercised nor the reports been thus happily directed into this channel to personal fame and universal weal, by any “*Surgeon General of a Navy*,” (there being no such officer in other “civilized nations,”) but by the “keeping and supervision of able professional MEN.” If the position be even correct, which I am not disposed to admit, it is a wise provision which consigns the literary and professional labors of men of talents, and learning, and observation, to the “keeping and supervision” of a body of “able professional men,” and not to the dogmatic *ipse dixit* anathemas of any *one* “intelligent and experienced of the senior Surgeons of the Navy,” whereby the caprice, and peradventure the self-love of a junior officer might, if this crude scheme were adopted in our Navy, be unrighteously affixed in condemning judgment against the professional lucubrations and writings, not only of his original senior in service, but, possibly, his incomparable superior in talents, education, and practical tact.

What man of pride or sensibility (if a man of sterling mind and enlightened education,) could bring himself to write for the supervision and favourable or condemnatory judgment of any *one* professional man, and especially one lifted perhaps above his intrinsic merit by the stilts of office—by the imposing title of “*Surgeon General of the Navy*?” Who does not know the general reluctance of professional men to submit their professional writings to the supervision of a professional friend, even? Can it be expected then, that any Surgeons in the Navy would strive to enlighten their professional colleagues by their medical views, or endeavour to render themselves “useful to the world by the diffusion of knowledge and the promotion of science,” if they were obliged to render their scrolls of records to the official rasp or burnisher, as the luck might be, of a “*Surgeon General of the Navy!*” (Who would bring grist to a mill subject to such heavy toll?) Would surgeons of education, talent, skill, observation, or genius, tolerate such surpassing vassalage? And if *they* would not, and most assuredly they never would, *whose* writings would the Surgeon General of the Navy have consigned to his



keeping and supervision? The answer is as sequent as indubitable—the *writings of men uneducated, without genius, talent, skill or observation!* or most probably *no writings at all*. Whether it be worth your while, gentlemen, to report a bill to the Senate or the House of Representatives for the appointment of an officer petitioned for, conspicuously on such predication, is for you to ponder.

Can it be contemplated that this august officer the “Surgeon General of the Navy,” shall issue instructions to Medical officers, (which by their official tenor shall be coercive,) to write disquisitional reports to him, subject to his learned acumen, consigned to his professional cupel for analysis, and arbitrated by the result of such complex powers of scrutiny and judgment? If so, the accomplishment of the idea would be unfeasible. The order he might give: one officer might do *that* to another; but that which is itself voluntary cannot be coerced. Meagre returns of sick, disabled—when taken sick or become disabled—how many died—when, where, of what disease, and like inconsequent items of a daily sick report with occasional remarks, he might order or exact. Such returns are now ordered and *exacted* by law and usage. More a Surgeon General could not by his wand of office, which is to reach from sea to sea, and from pole to pole, effect.\* The chirographical developments of mind and genius are not only ever purely voluntary, (except when venal in poverty,) but must proceed from a lofty ambition for merited distinction, a wholesome desire for literary and scientific fame, and a sincere and conscientious zeal to promote the general weal by professional experience. It is manifest, then, that on the ground of usefulness in being “charged with the reception of communications on medical topics, and to discriminate and determine concerning their merits,” a “Surgeon General of the Navy” is uncalled for, without precedent, and would be without benefit. It is clear too that as in “other civilized nations such records are carefully consigned to the keeping and supervision of able professional *men*,” a succedaneum for a Surgeon General can be found in a body of men as able as the Navy of the United States affords. This body is already established by a law of Congress, and appointed from time to time by the Honourable the Secretary of the Navy, for the purpose of examining candidates for admission into the Navy,

---

\* To refer to an illustrative proverb about a horse and a pool, will not be too strong an exposition of the impracticability of obtaining, by compulsion, efforts emanating from the will.

and those naval assistant Surgeons claiming legally, promotion. Such Boards consist of five Surgeons of the Navy. Their convening is once at least, not unfrequently twice a year, for the above specified purposes; but there would be no incongruity nor interference with the main duty, by the Secretary of the service, referring "communications on medical topics" to their deliberative view from time to time.\*

This kind of professional adjudication would be no anomaly, nor no onerous duty; neither would it be without precedent that such Boards should in future travel out of their chief path of action, to dispense some of their zeal towards promoting objects connected with the respectability and reputation of the Medical Department, over which they hold at present, by their prescribed duty, a more salutary control than the office of a Surgeon General could possibly exert. The present incumbent of the Navy Department only recently received courteously, and acted upon promptly and usefully, two important suggestions, for enhancing the efficiency of the Medical Department, made by the Board in July last. Yet it was no part of the duty of that Board to make any such suggestions, nor incumbent on the Secretary to adopt or abide by them when made. The glaring necessity, however, for the proposed modification in the eligibility of candidates alluded to, in the sense of the Board, and the

---

\*Such documentary jewels as are now, in the belief of your petitioners, cast away like pearl among swine. If jewels, indeed, their lustre and their value would be perceived and ascertained by five senior intelligent Surgeons of the Navy, among whom might chance to be the very one whose fame is to be emblazoned by the arms and heraldic achievement of a Surgeon Generalcy. I say *chance* to be, for if the iniquitous principle of selection of any other than the senior surgeon of the navy were carried out successfully, *his* destiny is in the embryo of fate who is to be the lucky one. What chicane, what intrigues, what strife would the admission of such an undisciplinary principle engender! Admit its action, and who shall say who is to receive the gorgeous ribined-favour from the presiding seat of the Tournay, at the tilt for the new Medico-Marine Knight-Marshalship,† the "Surgeon General of the Navy!!"

† The Knight Marshal is an officer attached to the household of the British King, who has cognizance of all irregularities, transgressions and omissions in the household and verge; and superintends all contracts made there—sees that the prices are fair; restrains them if exorbitant or inordinate; reports rules and regulations for its better order, &c. &c. What a similarity of duties to those of the projected office!



quick perception of the justness of its views by the Secretary of the Navy, led to the cause and the effect. It will not surely be said that a Surgeon General "selected from among the senior intelligent and experienced Surgeons of the Navy," is more competent to decide on the merits of "communications and reports sent by Surgeons to the Navy Department, advise the Secretary of their contents when important, and make such disposition of them as the interests of the service may require,"\* than FIVE of "the most intelligent and experienced Surgeons of the Navy" assembled in Board. If two heads are confessedly in all matters better than one, three are better than two—four enhance the benefit; and five, giving a majority of three over two in cases of difficulty, doubt, or disputation on meritorious papers, &c., would numerically confirm the advantage of such a course of supervision and decision; and, let me add, far more safely for individual reputation and quietude. No querulousness could arise, reasonably. Should any action be necessary other than that of the Secretary of the Navy on this point, an extension of the objects and duties of the Board of Examining Surgeons to meet this disposition of professional reports could readily be made by Congress. I have dwelt longer on this point of the petition than it intrinsically merits, because it is the most *specious* in its aspect—intimates such a suggested loss of learning and science from these neglected and cast-aside essays and communications! Before I leave it, allow me, gentlemen, to recur to the third paragraph of the petition; and to say that, in the absence of all proof, presented or tangible, I must be excused if I call your attention to the gratuitous positions of which it is made. I regret to differ with my colleagues, but must say the *onus* is with them to give you evidence, by reference to the works or the facts, that a single book, pamphlet, or essay, of a professional character, emanating from the medical officers of the British, French, Spanish, or any other navy, owes its publication to official adjudication for imprint. All the Naval medical authors have written either *con amore*, or from motives such as usually impel literary men to write, and always have they done this without any official fostering or direction. On their own responsibility and for their own reputation or pecuniary reward they have published. I am aware of no fact which can gainsay this difference of opinion from the assertive assumption of the petition. It may here properly

\*See Bill project, 6th paragraph.

be suggested to your Committees to make a call on the Secretary of the Navy for a schedule by titles, authors, and number of written pages, of all the "communications and reports on medical topics," which "are thrown aside at the Navy department as useless." Should these, contrary to my belief, be found numerous and imposing, perhaps it would not be a useless suggestion in order to abnegate this point in the manifesto-complaint of your petitioners, that reference of these documents to the next convened Medical Board might be made, to the end that decision be had on their merit. I take leave here to quote at length from my own work,\* written at an early age, and published in the year 1814, the following proposition for the establishment of a Medical Board, showing that when a junior surgeon (the twelfth on the list) I held the same sentiments as I now do. I did not then devise, any more than I now support, the creation of any such office as Surgeon General, simply because the idea, had it occurred, would have been repudiated as absurd.

"With a view to correct these abuses, I would in the first place propose: that there be established a sufficient number of commissioners to govern the medical department of the navy, and that they be styled a "BOARD OF MEDICAL COMMISSIONERS, *for conducting the hospital department of the U. S. naval service, and providing for sick, hurt, and disabled seamen.*"

"I would recommend that for the present, this board shall be composed of six or eight of the senior surgeons of the navy, of known abilities. It should be their peculiar province to furnish the navy department with such schemes, or systems of arrangement, as in their opinion would be adopted with most interest to the service. They should create established proportions of medicines, dietetic articles, instruments and utensils, necessary for the different vessels, &c. &c.

Such an association appertains to the British navy, under the

---

\* A Treatise containing a plan for the internal organization and government of Marine Hospitals in the United States, and a scheme for amending and systematizing the Medical Department of the Navy of the United States, by William P. C. Barton, M. D., Surgeon in the Navy of the United States, stationed at the Navy-Yard, Philadelphia, and formerly Physician to the Army in the 4th Military District; President of the Philadelphia Linnean Society, and Professor of Botany in the University of Pennsylvania. Second edition, 1817; from the first, 1814.—8vo. pp. 240.

title of "*Commissioners for conducting his majesty's transport service, for taking care of sick and hurt seamen, &c.*"

"I would propose that the board of medical commissioners should also be a Board of Examiners of candidates for the appointments of surgeons, and surgeons' mates in the navy—and that persons should never be commissioned in these capacities in the United States naval service, until they had satisfactorily passed this board. In fine, the board of medical commissioners should maintain a general superintendence over the medical department of our ships, and should from time to time, suggest to, or advise the Secretary of the Navy, of any alterations, amendments, or arrangements, that in their opinion might be deemed for the benefit of the medical naval service."\* There was no selfishness in this proposition, for being then a junior surgeon, I could not have expected, with eleven seniors over my head, to have been appointed one of the Board, the more especially as in the same work I strenuously insisted that seniority† should prevail in the appointments to fill all situations of honour and profit. I did not propose an office, with the questionable sincerity for public weal in the medical department, which would have arisen from a design either to get it for myself or participate in it: nor did I take or suggest any course by which my seniors might be detruded from rights which ought to be held imprescriptible.

It will be perceived that such a Board, now called a Board of Examining Surgeons, was many years after‡ established during the administration of the Navy Department by the Honourable Samuel L. Southard, by a law of Congress now in force. That most excellent Secretary of the Navy, whose rule of it was characterized by devotion to its interests, by decision, wholesome discipline, urbanity, and paternal care,—perceiving the necessity of this law, anticipated it by the institution\* of one or two Boards, prior to the action of Congress. The benefit which has arisen from these Examining Boards has been universally perceived, felt in the Navy, and acknowledged. Instead of any action on the project of a Surgeon Generalcy of the Navy, would it not be better that the duties of these Boards be *extended* so as to embrace all

\* Page 165.

† See page 142, first edition, or 140, second edition, of work quoted.

‡ An act for the better organization of the Medical Department of the Navy of the United States, approved 24th May, 1828.



the objects which may be strictly professional, contemplated by the advocates of that amorphous office? If it be conceived that these additional duties shall justify additional compensation, it might be worthy your thought and action, whether some such increased compensation for extra service of a novel, and if your petitioners be right, very important kind, to be given to those *for the time actually serving on Boards*, might not appear just. At present, Surgeons on duty on the stations where these Boards may be held, receive no additional compensation whatever, for the arduous, important, trustful, and very responsible examining duty. They are not exempt during the sessions of the Board, from the execution of their peculiar appointed duty. None complain of this—the fact is merely mentioned as such. Those who are on leave of absence, and sit at these Boards, receive for the time being, duty pay, and travelling expenses to the seat of sitting, but no per diem allowance. It might not inappropriately be a matter of consideration with your committees, whether, under these circumstances, and especially under the suggested extension, an established per-diem allowance\* might not be with propriety given to all, so engaged, (beyond mere duty pay,) commensurate with the serious nature and effect of their action, as conscientious men, on the welfare of the Medical Department. Assuredly the intelligent and experienced senior surgeons of the service can in no way perform a more momentous duty, of present and prospective advantage to that service, than that which is rigidly executed by these Boards. In the faithful performance of this task, “the valuable *lives* of officers and seamen *may be preserved* on foreign stations,” by repudiating all candidates not fit to be trusted with their lives: there is common sense in this. But a Surgeon General of the Navy could do no such thing: there is no common sense in the pretension that he could.†

---

\* Surgeons on these Boards formerly received a per diem of three dollars; then a per diem of five dollars; and afterwards, prior to the last pay law, a per diem of two dollars. One or other of these might be allowed by your report and action of Congress. Five dollars per diem, under the proposed *extension*, would be liberal and *just*. The Examining Surgeons of the Army receive, I believe, four dollars per diem while on that duty.

† If any sense at all, it must be very “*oncommon* sense” indeed, as Boz would make Sam Weller say. If there be sense, common or uncommon in it, I candidly confess it is occult to my mind—

A titular office, known by a useless badge of some kind, with a 'local habitation and a name,' may easily be devised. Like the scapulary of certain orders of the Romish church, covering the breast and back, from head to foot, as a badge indicative of a peculiar veneration for a single saint—a badge and titular appointment indicative of the important devices and august duties of a Surgeon General of the Navy may be instituted; that badge would be the *name*, but like the religious *signum*, it would be *the only* evidence of the existence of the peculiar devotion to one engrossing object, pertaining to the distinctive ornament. The titularity and innovation of an office without use would inevitably be a reproach to the wisdom of Congress and a smirch on its sagacity. In this "office at Washington," much could be said and much probably written on "economy," "efficiency," the "careful supervision" of the professional labours of other less fortunate surgeons in the navy—there might be much condemnation of many of these—a little approbation of a few—"damning with faint praise" like the reviewers, of some more, &c. &c.; many orders might be given of vaunted importance; many "rules and regulations drawn up and submitted to the Secretary of the Navy for the government of the Medical Department,"—but be assured, gentlemen, it would end here—it would be *vox et præterea nihil*.\*

---

wholly beyond my ken. What an *office* of pomposity and supererogation, therefore, would it be! Then imagine it filled with a grandiloquent, but tact-less man, of unwise and impracticable notions—what a catenation here in office and officer, of mountain-labour and mouse-parturition!!! This is supposable, as there is no knowing who might be officially *projected* into this project, if accomplished, unless its inutility be penetrated and the scheme quashed *in toto*.

\* A surgeon, mounted on this official hobby-horse, truly might and would rock forward and backward; quite as much (as is necessarily the case with hobbies) the last way as the first; or might, after becoming tired of this oscillatory movement, stand stock-still, as hobbies spontaneously do when not moved backwards and forwards; much noise in the house might and inevitably would be made; the very walls would shake by the impetus of energy; yet, save by these motions and the agitations of the rider, like the nursery boy, this way and that, kicking, gee-ing, gee-ho-ing, and mimic-spurring, still he would not advance the object he rides one inch from the salient start—indeed, by the antagonizing effect of these violent and divaricating movements of himself and the ludicrously contrived machine by which he is trussed up, both would by a synchronism slip on one

The Examining Boards of Surgeons have the supreme control over the fit qualifications of all aspirant candidates for admission, and all assistant surgeons claiming promotion. They have more than this safeguard to efficiency entrusted to them:—their examinations are not only astute, but uprooting to see the hold a young man's professional knowledge has in the *earth of his mind*, as well as to analyse, if possible, that earth closely, to ascertain if it be of strength, or has laid in fallow from exhaustion. Satisfied on these important points, a like peering is had into his moral strength and proper deportment, as well as other scrutiny into his personal fitness. The result is, that about a moiety of the candidates before every Board fails to be approved. Thus confided in by authority and law, can the surgeon's assistants of the service who pass such an ordeal,\* require the after-direction of a Surgeon General of the Navy, not superior to any one of the five, probably; perhaps inferior, and certainly four times less watchful and efficient. Let these Boards, then, be the Surgeon General of the Navy.

I proceed now to notice the fourth paragraph of the petition:

The first portion of this paragraph hinges on the attractive word "economy" coupled with "efficiency," both of which are uttered in "conviction" as to being secured ("gained"†) to the country, by having "an experienced and intelligent Naval Surgeon *near*‡ the seat of government, to discharge the various and important duties which *naturally* appertain to the office of Surgeon General of the Navy."

---

side or other of the *right line*, or the rider find he has jerked himself and his hobby *far back* of his first starting point. (What would be more lamentable, the Medical Department would be involved in this signal retrogradation.) The figure is not elegant, but it is better—it is forcibly illustrative of probable results, and cautionary prophetic.

\* Can it be possible that the approved grist—ground, sifted, and shook by five cog-wheels through the fine-bolt of such a mill—can fail to be fit for use?

† This may be the right word, since the saw tells us "*a penny saved is a penny gained*." It would be, figuratively, but a *penny* gained by this penny-wise and pound-foolish economy!

‡ *Near* the seat of government! Quite diplomatic already. Straws show which way the wind blows. I should say "an office in the Navy Department or convenient thereto," was near enough in all conscience, and the Secretary of the Navy would find it so. He would, I surmise, from this vicinal intermediary officer between himself and the medical corps, have abundance of trouble and "*sma profit*."



This word "economy" is a mere flimsy veil, the garniture of which is a fringe of "efficiency,"\* used to improve the complexional imperfections of the scheme.

But we will suppose him employed busily, and what is he doing? He is in the first place "to have an office in the Navy Department, or some place convenient thereto," (see projected bill, 2nd paragraph.) He is performing a duty more likely to be well executed by a clerk in the Navy Department, viz: receiving and taking charge of all written reports. He is scrutinizing them and awarding to each its due merit—weighing the pure metal when separated from the dross, in the nicely balanced scales of his well adjusted mind, and his mature, *infallible* judgment! All which I have made plain to you can more properly and more justly and more righteously be done by a Board of Surgeons. He is busily engaged communicating "such useful information *as he may possess* to surgeons going on foreign stations, concerning the prevailing diseases of the climates, and their treatment, and on the means of preserving health," (see 5th paragraph of projected Bill.) What! can it be thought of? Is the gifted, the educated, the practical, Passed-Assistant Surgeon of several years' standing and several years' actual experience under the eye and direction of a skilful surgeon, and a fleet surgeon perhaps, too,—is he who, after graduating in medicine and a preparatory collegiate course, was admitted, after severe scrutiny by a legal Board of Surgeons, an Assistant Surgeon; then after passing satis-

---

\*Still, Gossamer-like as this veil is, permit me to draw it aside, and take a clear view of, and reveal, what is ill-concealed behind it. In doing this, I see in conspicuous and gaudy attire, a uniformed, epauletted (for this will assuredly come afterward,) Surgeon General of the Navy, with other vain insignia of office equally imposing, and equally becoming a professional character—a naval officer first heard of in a Navy, in the Navy of the United States, if constituted. Pomp, vanity, selfishness, and self-sufficiency radiate from him, with an effect by no means beautiful, and an influence on all subject to his control, pernicious and dispiriting. Stilt-exalted, and officious enough, in all reason, at his *debut*, time will strengthen him in his hold, and render him arrogant and dictatorial and intolerant. He might be vindictive, for he would be human—he might be coarse in manners, and want *les bienséances* and *la politesse*. But enough. His object is "efficiency" to be given to the country, by a multiplicity of grave duties "naturally appertaining" to an officer who, in the elegant language of Major Jack Downing, "in all natur" never existed.

factorily *another severer* scrutiny by *another* Board some years after, is now promoted to be a Surgeon—is such an officer to be treated like a tyro? like a novice in medicine and in surgery? as if a student in a doctor's office about to visit one of his patients?—at the age of 5, 7, or 8-and-20; or 30 years?—entrusted though he be with the health and lives of the crew of a frigate or sloop of war? is he *still incompetent* to depart on his responsible mission without written instructions from a medical dictator of the service—the Surgeon General of the Navy at Washington? It will be recollected that this officer is to be immured during the rest of his life, (for the office is to be for life,) in “an office in the Navy Department, or convenient thereto.” If even he were an intelligent practitioner, with a mind replete with ready resources, and a habit of tact and expertness, when he went there, soon would he lose all this: and day by day would his practical adroitness evaporate in the cloistered atmosphere of his office. No one truth is more axiomatic in the profession of physic, than that daily familiarity with disease, in connexion with diurnal investigation of the causes for the time being, are, by their synchronizing operation on the mind of a medical man, indispensable to *keep him* a good and enlightened and successful practitioner. All reflection, and reading, and study, without daily observation of disease, will be purely scholastic. The jewel of medical learning, unset in the strong cincture of *practice*, is a jewel of appreciable but unavailable value. As with other unset jewels, the occasional gaze at them in their recipient casket, in a private room, may delight a friend or a favoured visiter; but a jewel, however lustrous and precious, which cannot be exhibited on the person of the wearer to the gaze of the community, delights few eyes. To drop the figure, the Surgeon General's instructions would be cloistered, and consequently impracticable, precepts. They would be characterized by imprecision and inaptitude. Voluminous or concise, clumsy or terse, they would alike be impotent.\*

---

\* The admiration of the uninitiated might be excited on perusing these promised evidences of erudite medical instructions from the office of a Surgeon General. They would view them much after that kind of varied and bewildered wonder with which those unacquainted with the trick view the reel in a bottle. Some would gravely ponder on how it could be got out—a still greater number would have unfeigned amazement how it ever got

Can it be thought of, that Congress should devise such manacles to restrain the energetic step of genius, or her quick and sturdy stride to usefulness and responsible action, as would be forged out of this monstrous tax on patience and endurance—this smothering incubus of the soul-stirring emotions of professional pride and ambition! How is the Surgeon General of the Navy to know the prevailing diseases of the climates for the time being, to which any Surgeon is bound? Supposing he had been, at times, in every climate under the sun, who that knows any thing of etiology and climatic influences, does not know that diseases differ in their type from year to year, from month to month, nay, from week to

---

in. One of penetration, however, could easily perceive the joints of which it is made up, and as readily detect the block-receptacle to which these in definite order are attached. Then, indeed, the mysterious fabrication is no longer so, but a palpable contrivance. The fabricator or fabricators of this project, in their zeal to magnify the usefulness of this office: in their great suffering for the want of it: and smarting (it would seem) like Robinson Crusoe for the want of a boat, determined, like him, to build up one; but, engrossed with the idea of the necessity of the machine, he built his so large and unwieldy that he could not move it, any more than the projectors of this bill could launch, steer or propel, this huge nautical machine to any good haven. The rule of architects in planning and erecting buildings, "that it is better a house should be too small for a day, than too large for a year," is a wise and useful one. If there be any want of a great officer in the Medical Department of the Navy, one day or so annually, it is better to be without him; since he would prove, like a private house built *extra* large to accommodate an annual party, an inconvenience and a trouble all the rest of the year. In sooth, I was so amazed at the magnificence of the projected advantages of a Surgeon Generalcy, that I could scarce believe my eyes when I *read* of them *on paper*! The idea is stupendous, but reminds one forcibly of Goldsmith's huge picture in the Vicar of Wakefield, and the mortifying dismay which followed a discovery that, when finished, "instead of gratifying the vanity of those depicted in it, it was much too large to be got through any of the doors, and was left leaning in a most mortifying manner against the kitchen wall, where the canvass was stretched and painted, the jest of all the neighbours." I should think this project is drawn on much too large a scale to gain entrance into even the great door of the capitol; and, if even so, that it could never be carried into or through either of the houses under its roof—and must consequently be left in the gangway, as a sign of immature judgment or unavailing scheming in its authors, and a warning against future similar projects.



week—differ in the intensity and character of their symptomatology; differ in their fatal or curative tendency; and above all, are discrepant in the *difference they require of treatment from time to time?* Even the crews of different ships are differently affected by the same influences, thermometrically and barometrically and meteorologically ascertained? A new crew is differently seized from one inured to discipline and the climate. Men accustomed to a sloop of war and living with immunity from disease in her, will be exposed to its inroads in a double-decked-vessel, and vice versâ. The discipline of one commander is protective from, and that of another probably encouraging to disease, according to his acumen or tact in relation to true discipline.\* Moral and dietetic influences, and those of dress, the internal economy of ships, the amusements, recreations—and severities or durance, granted to or imposed on crews—all individually and collectively conspire to modify or establish health, or invite disease; or render it inveterate when it shall have arisen from common causes. Tempests, rain-storms, gales, and consequent exposure to their influence, affect the liability of crews to disease or disorder. All these may occur in a cruiser unexpectedly, in latitudes hitherto proverbially exempt from their devastating and harassing agency. Besides this, admitting the moral agency of faulty discipline in creating disease, which no philosophic mind can refuse to do, the disposition and disciplinary course of a new commander cannot be known, and if a capricious man, not even of an old one. How is the Surgeon General of the Navy at Washington to guard against all this? The contemplated law of Congress is not to bestow prescience and universal knowledge. Yet to be all that he is proposed to be, he ought to be endowed not only with these attributes, but that of personal ubiquity.†

---

\* See Combe on the constitution of *man*; Sir Gilbert Blane's Medical Logic; Lind on Hot Climates; Clarke on Long Voyages; Trotter's Naval Medicine; Johnson on Tropical Climates; and Hints to Naval Officers cruising in the West Indies. By Wm. P. C. Barton, M. D.

† The Ogre's seven-leagued boots of the nursery story would not avail him, or stand in stead of this ubiquity. Nothing short of the possession of Aladdin's Lamp could serve the purpose. Nothing could render him operative but the Genii invoked by impinging this, which at an instant's warning could transport him, office, surrogate, reports, medicines, instruments, means of saving life, all in one swoop, to any sea or any land, and, at command, with the same

With what monstrous and gratuitous assumption, then, of superior ability would these all-important duties be discharged! What pretension is there in the scheme! How vain the thought! In downright plain language, if a Surgeon in the Navy, ordered to a sloop of war, or a frigate, or ship of the line, be not competent to go on a foreign station without receiving "the useful information that the Surgeon General of the Navy *may* possess, (he *may not* possess *any!*) concerning the prevailing diseases of the climates, and their treatment, and on the means of preserving health," why assuredly not only ought he to be cashiered forthwith as incompetent, but every member of the Board who passed him as "qualified to discharge the duties of a Surgeon in the Navy,"\* ought forthwith to be cashiered too, as incompetent to *his* duty; or if competent, what is worse, as having neglected to discharge it conscientiously and faithfully. For one, I most certainly shall never give my vote for the promotion of a Surgeon who may require such leading strings to keep him steady on his first essay even at Surgeon's duty. But the project does not confine the *judicious advice* to his *first essay*. Again and again it is to be repeated—no matter how old, *again and again!!!* even to a Fleet Surgeon, for nothing is stated to the contrary, therefore it might be done. This important office of Fleet Surgery, which *does exist* in foreign navies, is passed by as something which is *nothing!* Not a word is used to remind you of its existence. It requires, gentlemen, in my estimation, nothing but a call on common sense, certainly no professional knowledge, to penetrate the awkward results of a contemplated duty pertaining to so grave a matter as that now in view. And if no heavier duties can be urged for achievement by a Surgeon General of the Navy, it is indeed a light office, and should be held lightly by you in any thought you may incline to bestow upon it.

To recur however, for a moment, to the case of a young Surgeon

---

celerity, back again. All this must be done, (in the characteristic and expressive, though quaint language, of "down east,") in a "streak of lightning," or in "less than no time." Gifted as he may (or peradventure may not be,) he will have none of these attributes; possess none of these wonderful means to do impossibilities.

\* The language of the Board of Examination in their report of an approved candidate for promotion.

(that is, one recently promoted,) on his first cruise, as such, at the age of 27 or 30.\* Suppose disease shall assail his charge, being altogether a new crew—a fatal disease, Asiatic cholera, yellow fever, small-pox, measles, pleurisy, dysentery, or ship fever. He, who is ready on all common occasions, prompt by character and efficient by knowledge, is, to use a sea phrase, “taken aback” by the weight of responsibility, and the disasters around him hourly thickening. Medical men on shore in private practice, constantly in such cases seek counsel and advice from older or more experienced heads. So in the Navy. The printed rules and regulations of the Navy Service make it the duty of all Surgeons to consult with those vicinal to them in all difficult or unusual cases. But a law† of Congress of 1828, provides a legal and *official consultee* in all fleets and squadrons. This officer is by law Surgeon of the flag ship, and is appointed a *Fleet Surgeon* by the President of the United States, and not by the Secretary of the Navy: who, however, it is naturally presumed, suggests him to the President. Why, then, did the law direct that the Chief Magistrate of the United States should “designate and appoint” him, since virtually he is appointed by the Secretary of the Navy? It is not needful that you, gentlemen, being legislators, should be told *why*. Was it not to give him, and very properly, official importance in the fleet, where he would deserve it, and with his commander, where he would require it? From commanders of squadrons, always has this officer, (except in one *flagitious* instance of irruption on what should—by any proper or humane, or dutiful, or officer-like man,—have been held the *imprescriptible* rights of *any* medical officer, much more a Fleet Surgeon)—always, I am glad to say, have the Fleet Surgeon and his rights, with this one *monstrous exception*, been respected. As,

---

\* Bichat, the illustrious Anatomist, died at 30, and many of the best medical and surgical and scientific productions of the world are from men from 25 to 30.

† Sect. 2. *And be it further enacted*, That the President of the United States may designate and appoint to every fleet or squadron an experienced and intelligent Surgeon, then in the naval service of the United States, to be denominated “Surgeon of the Fleet,” who shall be Surgeon of the flag ship, and who, in addition to his duties as such, shall examine and approve all requisitions for medical and hospital stores for the fleet, and inspect their quality; and who shall, in difficult cases, consult with Surgeons of the several ships, and make records of the character and treatment of diseases, to be transmitted to the Navy Department.



however, this revolting exception has occurred *once*, the navy and the nation may be shocked by its recurrence. It is not too much to expect of your wisdom, gentlemen, as having in charge and keeping the naval affairs of the nation; nor too improbable a thing to hope, that, for the sake of humanity, you may devise some law which will ensure that a similar outrage may never occur in the Navy. Some action emanating from your devisement might prevent it,—by rendering a medical officer impregnable in his official and professional rights of opinion and advice and action. Why was this really important officer lost sight of in the petition? If a Surgeon General was to be constituted, what was to become of the Fleet Surgeon? He must be, by law, an “*experienced and intelligent Surgeon.*” His duty is to maintain that *practicable vigilance* over the medical concerns of the squadron, including the means of preserving health, and arresting and curing disease, which is *impracticably* devised for a “Surgeon General of the Navy, with an office in the Navy Department, or convenient thereto.” If in the case of the epidemics I have imagined, embarrassment shall occur in port, the Surgeon has the option, and it is even customary, to consult with Surgeons of foreign navies, or with army Surgeons of the foreign station, if none of our own ships should be there. But if any should be there, it would be the Surgeon’s *duty*, by rule and regulation, to call on his brother Surgeon. And if the embarrassment should occur at sea, the Fleet Surgeon is in company in the Flag, if indeed he have not been in company in port. Should neither of these happy aids be available, I ask, with what semblance of wisdom or utility would the distraught insulated Surgeon recur to his “valuable instructions from the Surgeon General of the Navy,” which he received before his departure—the embarrassment being in all probability one never contemplated or imagined in the *sanc-tum sanctorum* of learning and professional forethought at Washington?

It is time I should proceed to notice the second clause of the fourth paragraph of the petition. It is a “conviction” set forth with imposing and seductive emphasis, and emanating from whoever of my colleagues are your petitioners, (for the petition of course must be signed by some Surgeons, though I know not by whom, having only heard certainly of one and one assistant)—it craves and shall receive my most attentive consideration. It is this: “Your petitioners are convinced, from long experience, that, frequently, the valuable lives

of officers and seamen may be preserved on foreign stations, by the judicious advice which he," (the Surgeon General of the Navy, that is to be) "could furnish to the Navy Department, and Surgeons going on foreign service." This has clearly been designed to be the argument *ad hominem*, for *humanity* is its basis.\*

In no one aspect of this part of the petition, is there a single cobweb claim for this new office, which would be of sufficient tenacity or strength to hold a gnat; much less to bear the grappling-feelers of those rude things called facts. How tangling and destructive of the fragile web of sophistry are the claws of reason induced from every-day probabilities! Permit me to review this imposing position in some latitude. It merits all your attention,† and may need all my wits at my fingers' and pen's ends to sift it to your satisfaction. First, then, hypothetically assuming that the bill has been passed and the office created—should I by any chance become the incumbent, in the event of the death or resignation of my only senior, I honestly confess now that I should be totally unable "*frequently to preserve the valuable lives* of officers and seamen on foreign stations, by" any "judicious advice" I "could furnish to the Navy Department and to Surgeons going on foreign service;" unless, indeed, (perhaps not then,) I was to go along with such officers and seamen to such foreign station, Surgeon General of the Navy although I might be, office, &c., all along. If I did possess this power to save valuable lives, I would immediately, within ten days, publish my means and instructions to the world, that "Surgeons going on foreign stations" might avail themselves of this work of humanity. That part of the projected duty or advantage of the office no other surgeon could flatter himself to realize, while he was quietly writing in his office at Washington, from which it is proposed to issue such judicious advice to the Navy

---

\* This shaft was meant to reach *to the quick*, and make those who felt it, *quick* in establishing the new office. I scarce know how to begin, in an attempt to grapple with this herculean argument. It is indeed a clincher, a *gouger*, a *rough-and-tumble* argument, which pounces upon you and hits any where and every where, in the struggle for the mastery. After all—it is "*no go!*"

† It startled me, and still perplexes me; because its meaning is almost beyond my ken. But there are some incomprehensible things, as the noted leaper would have said, which may be comprehended as well as others. I will therefore strive to *Patch* up some kind of an answer to it.

Department and the Surgeons about to depart, as to how they might hereafter preserve valuable lives. If reference be had to general information, then indeed I could, probably, as well as another, refer the Surgeon to, or request the Department to direct him to consult—certain of the best and most lucid authors on the diseases endemic or epidemic in the climate he was bound to. For I could not, even had I been there, and practised there, have the vanity to think I was as *aufat* as the learned writers on the subject.

Nautical medical literature is abundant and accessible: and I should think, if this be the means in view for preserving lives, that it would be far more efficient for the Secretary of the Navy to instruct the next Board of Examination to furnish him with a list of the approved and useful writers on tropical diseases; the diseases incident to long voyages; the endemics and epidemics of the South American and North American coasts; the windward and leeward West India coast; the Mediterranean coast and ports; the Pacific coast; the India seas, &c. &c., and procure copies for the dispensary of every ship departing.\* There are publications on most if not all these subjects. Prophylactics, general, special, and incidental, and nautical hygiene, constitute part, and a *very important part* of subjects claiming a Naval Surgeon's attention; and the vigilant interposition of these between existing health and impending disease forms a momentous portion of his imperative *duty*. Enlightened and elaborate views on all the means of preserving valuable lives are in the cognizance of every intelligent and studious and practical Naval Surgeon. The philosophic contemplation of hygienical science is not only attractive and interesting in an intense degree, but will inevitably render a Naval Surgeon more effective. If, therefore, it be not subjects of this kind which would constitute the important prospective advice alluded to, I am utterly at a loss to divine what it is. And if it be this prophylactic and hygienic practice that is hinted at, why then surely there is no "senior Surgeon of intelligence and experience" in our Navy, and I rate them all highly respectable, and some of them eminent—nor any Surgeon or Assistant Surgeon in it, who can have the *slightest claim* to have amassed the im-

---

\* Such books *ought to be provided by government* as part of the medical outfit. Real advantage would result from an appropriation annually of a sufficient sum to furnish standard works on surgery and nautical medicine to ships and to navy yards, and to hospitals.



portant intelligence for which the writings of nautical authors of transatlantic countries have long been distinguished. If any Surgeon possesses at this moment, the fund of wholesome advice which would, if furnished to the Secretary of the Navy, and to Surgeons going on foreign service, "preserve frequently the valuable lives of officers and seamen," I hold it to be the conscientious and bounden *duty* of that Surgeon not to wait until he be appointed Surgeon General of the Navy, with an office "*near the seat of government,*" ere he disgorges his valuable intellectual *ingesta*, but "as a measure of sound policy and humanity, and as being connected with the progress of civilization, and the respectability of national character," (see the lofty views of petition, last paragraph, absolutely incomprehensible in relation to the office petitioned for,) to communicate it *all at once*, FORTHWITH, for the benefit of those who are departing every day on foreign stations.

I am conscientiously of opinion that it is the imperative duty of every Surgeon in the Navy, who feels within the compass of his information or talents something of general utility to the Department of the service to which he belongs, to communicate it by publication, *even at some cost to himself*, especially if so *very important* in its salutary tendency and its life-preservative power, in order to realize that utility. If he have enterprise and energy he ought to do so.\*

---

\* I have done so, and have, carrying this opinion out, frequently written reports to the Navy Department on subjects connected with the general weal of the Medical Department. The present legal Boards of Examination, the first increase of the pay of medical officers, the establishment by usage of Examining Surgeons at Naval Rendezvous, the abolishment of the Surgeon's Five Dollar Perquisite, (a mulct from the foremast-man's pay,) have all grown out of the suggestions of the necessity of these emendations, set forth and insisted on in a work already quoted, published at my own heavy expense, although *written at the solicitation of a Secretary of the Navy*.† Every Surgeon who has any thing important to communicate can do so through the press, and ought to do so. An intelligent Surgeon has, by his "Three Years in the Pacific," and his forthcoming work "A Voyage Round the World" earned an enviable reputation for graphic talent and for useful observation. The field is fairly open for medical, surgical, and literary development of talents and zeal, and all should enter it who claim to rise in reputation or usefulness.

† Paul Hamilton, Esq.

All this may be accomplished without a Surgeon General to shackle and abortively direct, talents and genius and tact, which may be of an order far more lofty and practicable than his to whose lot this new projected office might fall. The action of Congress may more profitably be centred on the plan of enlarging the duties of the present established Boards of Surgeons, as yet restricted, as you know, to examining candidates for admission and promotion. All-important as is the duty performed by these Boards, in securing men of talents, education, tact, and moral strength, to the corps, a latitudinous scope of matters strictly professional being given to their labours, would supersede any asserted necessity for the creation of a new office; an office carrying inefficiency in itself, from the very nature of the divaricating, distant, and long absent subjects of its control. Specious as the project, and luminous in its details of adequacy, as it may appear at first glance, still, gentlemen, like that gigantic and lustrous effort of humbug and disciplined imagination,—the moon hoax,—it requires to be but half read through to be satisfied of its unreality; its practical nullity and impossibility. Even in the *Army* in France it is said by good authority that an office similar to this projected one, was brought into contempt and disuse by numerous frivolous edicts. Among the evidences of its arbitrary and self-sufficient impotence was an edict, declaring, that if the Regimental Surgeons did not cure intermittent fevers with a certain dictated medicine within a definite number (very few) days, the Surgeons should be cashiered! A distinguished author mentions among other absurd dogmas, emanating from a similar supervisory office in Britain, that one was promulgated by the “Director or Surgeon General of the Army,” who was a contagionist, of surpassing absurdity. He had been so annoyed, that the regimental and staff Surgeons espoused the present almost universal and more rational doctrine of non-contagionism, that he had the folly to issue an order that “all the Surgeons should thereafter *believe* in contagion.” !!! If these anecdotal illustrations of the intolerance of what was considered medical heresy by a shallow-pated, conceited Surgeon General of the British Army; and the folly which pride of office and an arbitrary disposition may engender—point to any aspect or bearing of the present contemplated project, they will not have been introduced here without use. They may, by the instructive lessons they afford, have the effect of attenuating the strength of the strong bands by which the recent and pending attempt to bind such an officer as Surgeon

General of the Navy, on its medical corps, has been attempted. They will do so by the broad and characteristic exhibition of the unfeasibility of new experiments of a similar nature. Thence may be deduced the nugatory and discreditable results of institutions which in another branch of military service do exist or have existed, of a similar nature. I am not prepared to say any thing on the position advanced in the petition relative to the Surgeon General of the United States Army (2nd paragraph of petition,) possessing no certain information in relation to its duties or objects. But even if the fact be found on investigation, as stated, it is no just argument in this case, for there is no parallelism between the Army and Navy Medical Service. Such an office in the Army is more practicable; if judiciously conducted it may perhaps be useful. The Army has no Surgeons similar to our Fleet Surgeons in effect. The whole corps is constantly on *terra firma within mail reach or express riding*, if needful and important. Whereas the more actively employed part of our Surgeons are 1500, 3000, and 6000 miles distant for two or three years at a time. If, therefore, by accident the vaunted instructions which are "frequently to save valuable lives," are unluckily lost by any of the common chances of desultory travel and sojourn, capsizing of a boat and loss of Surgeon's baggage, &c. &c., what an awkward *hiatus* must happen in the Surgeon's efficiency, until he shall have written to the Surgeon General's office in the Navy Department at Washington from Smyrna, or any Mediterranean port or Valparaiso, from the Levant or the East or West Indies, the Grecian Ionian Isles, the Baltic, the British Channel, the Indian seas, the coast of Coromandel and Chochin-China—for a duplicate copy of his valuable arcana for preserving life! This far-fetched, is not an inconceivable case. Such a loss is not only possible, but very probable in the hurley-burley of a naval life. In fine, I pronounce any idea of benefit, such as is proposed, "in saving valuable lives" a mere hallucination. The Surgeon General is to have another Surgeon under him, "in case of sickness or absence," to attend to his duties.\* By slipping in this official

---

\*In other words, there are to be two Surgeon Generals. One, the *great* Surgeon General, or Surgeon General *par excellence*, the other a lesser, or a *small* Surgeon General. One might be denominated Surgeon General of Division, the other Surgeon General of Brigade, for either of these terms is as much divested of incongruity in reference to marine service as that of the Surgeon General of the Navy.



surrogate, it is evident that one Surgeon General is not deemed enough by your petitioners: thus I am glad to see approximating to my idea, that five together, already legally organized by periodical appointment, extended by your suggestion, and after confirmation by act of Congress,—would in reality be the legitimate subject of deliberation with a view to improve the medical interests of the service. There is something quite novel in thus providing for an emergency of *sickness as something very likely to occur in the Surgeon General of the Navy?* Every man is liable to sickness every hour and every minute of his life. This is a truism that legislators never dream of acting on, or providing for in the establishment of offices. No such provision was even contemplated, or at least never expressed in any devisement that I ever heard of, of an office of any kind, civil or military. It is indeed a very queer not to say absurd provision. If an officer become sick, he cannot for the time, of course, perform his duty, and assuredly you will readily agree with me, that so important an officer as the Surgeon General is represented to become, would have no business to be “absent” from the scene of his operations, viz: his “office in the Navy Department at Washington, or convenient thereto.” Why is “absence” from so *all-important* a post, from a vocation so replete with beneficial operations—contemplated, or provided for? Is it that it may be frequent? and legalized by enactment of Congress might it not virtually be for the most of the year? Who shall say? Would not such clause enable the incumbent to live in this city or elsewhere, and delegate (for it is proposed to be so provided by law,) his duty to his substitute? It will be recollected that it is not a *sine qua non* that this assistant is to be “one of the most intelligent and experienced of the senior Surgeons of the Navy”—he is to be a “Surgeon of the Navy,” and may therefore be any one, perhaps the youngest, just promoted, perhaps the least intelligent of the whole corps. Who shall say? Suppose during his absence a Surgeon is bound forthwith on “foreign service,” who is to give him or the Secretary of the Navy for him, that important advice which is to save “*frequently* the valuable lives of officers and seamen?” We may imagine a sick man, on a sick bed, dictating it to one who is well, to have it communicated. But this would be no curative task, nor one easily performed. If, therefore, any importance is attempted to be attached to this sagacious advice—it seems that “sickness” or “absence,” both of which are contemplated as

very likely to occur, (else a special provision would not have been made for such misadventures,) would, the one partially paralyze, the other positively nullify, the benefits proposed; for it cannot be supposed that the comparatively inexperienced surgeon, who is to be the assistant, can be a *locum tenens* intellectually as well as officially. It is worthy of remark that such importance is attached to health, in deciding on the qualifications of candidates for admission as assistant surgeons, by surgeons, that—one of the points mentioned in this pamphlet, (p. 6,) of suggestion by the Board in July last to the Secretary of the Navy on which he so promptly and usefully acted, was, that all who laboured under impaired health, should be excluded. Those who drew up, or were engaged in aiding in the proposed bill for a Surgeon General, were of that very Board—and unanimity caused our report to the Secretary. Talents, tact, energy, and health, are requisite for an important “office of all work,” like a Surgeon Generalcy is proposed to be. Why then is the sickness of the embryo incumbent and absence from his post, imagined or proposed to be legally provided for? If, therefore, these duties are so momentous, they ought not to be delegated to another incapable of performing them; and if they might be so delegated in the opinion of your petitioners, they *must be* inconsequent in nature and force—and the office asked for of Surgeon Generalcy is preposterously magnified in its usefulness.

It is proposed in the bill that the Surgeon General is to “have charge, control, and direction of medicines, instruments, and hospital stores, so as to prevent waste and promote economy in the expenses of the Department.” How is this to be practicable? All articles are purchased on the requisition of the Surgeons at the stations and in the ships, at the time they are wanted, and not sooner, for the obvious reason of their destructibility; they are required and consumed constantly, and as it were, *gradatim*, at distance in all instances, save that of the Surgeon stationed on duty at Washington, mostly at great distances from the office of the Surgeon General, as it is contemplated. It is an utter impossibility to realize this duty, and it is consequently as nugatory as the seductive “economy” would be unreal. No economy could *thus* result whatever might be promoted by plans which might be devised and executed, and of which this forms no part. Constant difficulty and trouble, besides an annoying interference with a Surgeon’s legitimate duty, would be the result of any such attempt as is here contemplated.

“The examination of bills and accounts to see that articles are furnished at fair prices,” is also an impracticable duty for a professional man, unaccustomed, from the very nature of his education, to the duty of an accomptant: and the familiarity with the vacillating prices of commerce in Surgeon’s necessities, is only to be acquired by a man in trade, or Navy Agents. Besides this, such a duty would be an infringement on the functions of those Agents. It is the duty of these contracting, furnishing, and paying officers at this time, and ever has been, since they were in existence as officers, to execute *this very duty*. Their constant habit of examining accounts by items and charges, gives them a familiarity with the market price. They necessarily examine the bills of different persons in the same line of business, for the same or similar kinds of surgeon’s necessities. A Navy Agent may at any time find a difference worth noticing in the charges for these in an account presented for payment. There are now price-restraining checks by the usual approving course of the Surgeon’s certificate, the commanding officer’s approval, and the naval store-keeper’s receipt. The proposed duty, therefore, would be an uncalled for interference with that of these Navy Agents—a class of officers known to be vigilant, cautious, and correct. On the ground of this proposed duty, then, there is no semblance of necessity for a Surgeon General. But, further, how is he to have “charge and control of instruments, medicines,” &c., when they must necessarily be under the “charge and control of the Surgeons of ships and stations who want them for use?” As well might a manager of a theatre at New Orleans have charge and control there of the wardrobe of an actor “starring” now in Washington, next in Baltimore, anon in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, &c.; here to-day, gone to-morrow. If “charge and control” be used here in the only sense applicable, the Surgeon General could not possibly have “charge and control” of these necessities. If his “charge and control” of and over them have reference to them when not in use, at sea, or at stations, or hospitals, why then the best Surgeon General would be a surgical instrument maker, to give a receipt for and preserve in order the instruments; and the best disposition which could be made of old and residual medicines after a cruise, would be a survey and condemnation, or a public sale of them. I am positive money would be saved by this course. As there can be no residual medicines or stores at hospitals



or stations, because they are "required" when wanted only, the whole of the duty devised for a Surgeon General on this item of the projected bill is an impossible duty, and the necessity for such an officer on this account a chimera. Can it be proposed that his duties shall be those of a purveyor, to contract for and *purchase* all these things? If so, a degree of patronage and power, united with pecuniary latitude, is implied, which should never be delegated to nor united with the duties of a medical officer, because it is unprofessional that he should become a fiscal agent. No surgeon can, by law, be the recipient of public money to *any* amount, and he should not be, for the reason stated. In the constant performance of the duty of "requiring" surgeons' necessities for my own use, and for the ships and hospitals I have furnished in the line of that duty for twenty-nine years I have been a surgeon in the Navy, during which time I was twenty months Executive Physician and Surgeon of the Army in the Fourth District by appointment of General Armstrong, Secretary of War—furnished and conducted two military hospitals and performed a duty at the Lazaretto and camp and all the rendezvous, which required the constant and heavy supply of surgeons' necessities—acted as purveyor of some supplies which went to the lines,—yet during all this duty I never had any sum to the amount of half a dollar in my hands.\* I believe you gentlemen, as legislators, will be wary of fostering any law which could have the effect of delegating unprofessional concerns to a professional officer. If a purveyorship should be established, it should not be by such a law as the one now proposed. In the archives of the Navy Department will be found a thorough investigation and exposition of the principles on which such an office should, if ever adopted, be established. It is a document which I wrote with great care, comprising a detail of sixteen items of duty, and which I transmitted to Mr. Branch on the 4th of March, 1831. I beg leave to quote one single paragraph from it, quite apposite to my present objections to an item of the projected law, which would or might give fiscal duty to the medical officer proposed.

---

\* So thoroughly did I esteem this duty unprofessional, that a refusal to be the intermediary disbursing officer in the Army service, of the sum of only two dollars, involved me in a very serious difficulty with the then Adjutant General of the Fourth District.

"Article 14th. The Purveyor is to handle no public money, and only to sign the bills of his purchases."

The other points noticed in the 10th paragraph of the projected bill as proposed duties, are so glaringly the franchise of the Secretary of the Navy, and an interference with them so entirely subversive of his official power and rights, that I shall notice them particularly, and by reference to the official conduct of each Secretary of the Navy for the past sixteen years. I cannot, however, forbear, first expressing surprise that such a document could ever for one moment have been thought likely by your petitioners to receive the countenance and recommendation of that functionary. The very *delicate* attempt to wrest from him the duties for which, among others similar in other departments of the service he is appointed, and which he has immemorially performed, are thus set forth: "He (the Surgeon General) shall keep a register of the duty performed by each surgeon and assistant surgeon; he shall detail all medical officers in regular turn for orders to ship and shore stations, and see that justice is scrupulously done to all, by making each perform his proper portion of sea service."\*

I would be glad to learn what duties or control in relation to medical officers of the service would be left for the Secretary of the Navy, if this or any other bill with a clause similar to that of the

---

\* Construing the sense of this language, without any travestie of its naked meaning, it is thus:—We beg leave, Mr. Secretary of the Navy, to ask you most respectfully to sign our petition to the Naval Committee of the Senate. We are tired of being governed, like all other officers of the Navy, by its Secretary. We want to govern ourselves. We cannot consent any longer to be directed and detailed for duty by you. We are a peculiar race of men, of peculiar modes of thinking on gubernatorial matters. We are like heteroclitc nouns substantive—we are irregular and insusceptible of modification (declension) by ordinary rules governing nouns substantive. We wish to stand aloof from the direction which controls all other departments of the service, for we have peculiar views, feelings, prejudices, partialities, &c., which pertain not to them. We have an *esprit du corps* and an *esprit de la morale*, essentially and distinctively our own. Therefore we pray you to advance our views and sever us from your official powers. Remove us from the reach of your functional eye—we will take care of ourselves. If you want medical officers at any time, for sea or shore service, apply to our Surgeon General, and you shall have them. There is not a bit too much power and patronage for us in all this!!!

projected bill, should be passed? The Surgeon General would be, by this very modest item, to all intents and purposes, the Secretary of the Navy. I scarce know which most to wonder at, the device itself, or the incomprehensible expectation that any Secretary of the Navy would assign away his own especial duty, by recommending a bill with such a clause, to your committees. This petition for power is for its modesty quite *unique*! But, supposing for a moment such power and such duties were unrighteously taken from the Secretary of the Navy and given to a Surgeon General, who would be the better for that? No one but the Surgeon General himself, by the gratification of a longing after power and patronage. Consequential pride and arrogance would be the probable result of this aggrandizement. Who is intended, ostensibly, to be benefitted by such a wild scheme? The medical officers. Indeed! Would they be benefitted? How? Yet they are petitioning for a medical ruler!! Does it not remind you, gentlemen, of *Æsop's* fable of the frogs that petitioned for a king? A king they got: and such a king! Sick enough would the medical officers be, and soon enough sick, of such a ruler. Imagine all the imaginable things which would be likely to hang about the realm of this potentate, and you will not imagine a bit too much. Who in his senses would not a thousand times sooner prefer the rule of the Secretary of the Navy, which must be without professional or personal bias, to that of any Surgeon General?

Enough of this curious item of the bill. Other inconsequent chatulary duties devised could be better performed by a common clerk in the Navy, such as filing medical records, &c. &c., and are consequently not worthy of more than this passing notice.

I am willing to auspicate the inutility of this office, from the well known inutility and abortive results of that of the "Medical Bureau," established by solicitation (as earnest and as specious as that you *now* have presented to you, from some\* of the medical

---

\* I say *some*, for it is by no means general. I cannot even get information who have signed this petition, though I have written to Washington to obtain intelligence on this head. An answer from my correspondent, received on the 24th inst., post-marked the 23d inst., has this reply: "I have not been able to see the petition, and cannot correctly inform you of the number of the signatures." Late conversation with several medical officers here, (who have not signed it, and one, a distinguished author, had not been called on to



officers of the Navy) during the administration of the Navy Department by Mr. Woodbury.\* On the impulse of that scapement was promised the motion and the continued action of the wheels, and wheels within wheels, which were to regulate the system of the Medical Department, and render it free from error in time and in operation. The failure of that project is *conclusive* against the wisdom of another similar attempt pregnant with similar priceless advantages!

Mr. Woodbury listened to these importunities, weighed their specious force, and in an unlucky hour, established the "Medical Bureau." Had opportunity been afforded me to speak concerning that project, I would have spoken as loudly against the feasibility of its contemplated benefits as I now do against the one under notice. I was against it, and in conversation always opposed it. But I deemed it a paltry affair, a bagatelle got up by chimerical men, which would not last long; and therefore did not think it worth the trouble conspicuously to come out against it. An "experienced senior Surgeon of the Navy" filled that office. He had an

do so,) convinces me that a small proportion only of the medical officers is in favour of the scheme; and I suspect when they receive further information, many will hereafter withdraw their assent.

\* I have touched on Mr. Southard's character as Secretary of the Navy. For a purpose which will be seen in the sequel, let me now give a passing notice of the official character, as I estimate it, of Mr. Branch's successor just named. Mr. Woodbury was a *business-man*, of excellent memory; cold, it was said, in manner, though I found him not so. He had no more distance of manner than what was, doubtless, deemed by him, and would be by many others in the same office, suited to the place. This reserve being grafted on an original stock of characteristic calmness and circumspection, it partook, therefore, somewhat—as grafts do—of the nature of the stock. Thus he appeared a cool and calculating routine officer.† He was, as an officer, an upright one, and I think a precise man, parsimonious of promises, but keeping scrupulously all he did make. His pocket-book memoranda, when applications were made to him for orders, were often afterward found to be as good as *promises*, though none were given at the time. He was unquestionably desirous of achieving what he could be brought to believe was for the welfare of the Navy; hence his luckless acquiescence in the project mentioned in the text.

† Officers like to see, and look for, some evidences of feeling and warmth besides this. I believe both often exist in Secretaries, and have their influence, when not at all apparent.

intelligent, active assistant.\* Yet all would not do. No good came of the office, for the simple reason, that no good could or can come of any such supervising office. It was a nullity—A reproach. Governor Dickerson, soon after coming into the Department, perceived this, and promptly and sagaciously abrogated it.† I crave, gentlemen, your most serious and constant remembrance of this fact. I refer you to the Honourable the Secretary of the Navy at this time, with confidence, for his confirmatory report on the statement I have made of the uselessness of that office.

I have purposely given in this communication a sketch of all the Secretaries of the Navy, since the time of Mr. Monroe's presidency, up to the time of the present incumbent coming into office. They are out of office, and I have no reason to withhold the true and the just estimation of their official rule. It would be manifestly indecorous to speak of an incumbent; my motives might be cavilled at—not by that gentleman, for he knows me, but by others.‡ But to complete the data on which I am about to predicate a few remarks, I must refer to his conduct to medical officers. His courtesy to them has been universal and unparalleled. There exist innumerable proofs of this. Then, gentlemen, from the characters of all the Secretaries of the Navy since the time of President Monroe to the present day, (many will doubtless except Mr. Branch,) is there not sufficient guaranty for just dealing with our corps? Could we be half as safe in the hands of a Surgeon General?§ I think not.

\* Now a passed assistant Surgeon on the list for promotion, who I am proud to call a former pupil: one who has done much and indefatigably, for the benefit of the corps, exhibiting a praiseworthy zeal in its interests, and being stationed for some years past at Washington, has had opportunities of directing it to advantage.

† This *vaunted* "Medical Bureau" was established in 1834, and abolished in 1835. It had a short life, but not a merry one, for it was the target at which shafts of reproach were continually directed. Governor Dickerson was the best marksman, he hit the centre and carried the palm.

‡ In "A History of the Navy," for which I have been long collecting materials, and a portion of which is written, I shall feel freedom, and it will be my duty then as historian of the service, to speak at large, and I will not then fail to do him justice.

§ This chimera was talked of during the very earliest part of Mr. Branch's short official career in the Navy Department, but not by the Surgeons themselves. It was said, and I believe there is no doubt of the fact, that Mr. Branch conceived the idea of

Amongst the countless objections to this objectionable project, one remains to be noticed with emphasis, transcendantly obnoxious.

appointing a medical gentleman,<sup>†</sup> who had no connexion with the medical corps of the Navy, the Surgeon General. Such an idea was inexpressibly outrageous. If carried out to realization, it would have been an absolute insult on all and every medical officer of the service. Yet I do not think Mr. Branch viewed it in that light, or he would certainly not have espoused such a humiliating and unjust project. His mind was not of that cast which could have placed the subject, in his first view of it, before his reflection in all its bearings,—in the light it was viewed and ought to have been viewed by the medical officers. It was an error, as in other instances of his official misprision, of his judgment, but not of his heart. He had nothing sinister about him, and his disdain of trick or subterfuge was written in his countenance. I should have trusted his word for *any thing* after the first survey of it: In a word, he was a man of honour, of the cavalier school, and would have been the last man living, if I judge him right, who would have borne an insult or tolerated designed contumely. Such are not apt to conceive much less give insults. Besides this, he was a man of good principles. No such man could conceive a deliberate insult on a respectable and important branch of his official control; and, in fact, *he* did not. His views led him to different notions of the affair entirely. He was wholly unacquainted with the nature of the service or the feelings and rights of officers, when he came into office: but as soon as he learned the project would not be tolerated for the reasons alluded to, he abandoned it. His errors were numerous, but I am quite sure, from what I knew of him, unpremeditated as such, and arose altogether from a wrong-headed notion of the kind of sway he was called on to exert, and from want of tact to perceive how insufferable his peremptory course was; and how thoroughly it subverted the very salutary discipline and harmony he aimed at with such an elevated and tense a bow, that his arrow shot far above and beyond the mark. He had begun to retrieve his errors before he left the department; and as good was really his only object, and as he was a man of great integrity and high-mindedness, I believe, had he continued some years Secretary of the Navy, he would have been as popular as he was eminently unpopular during his short career. The medical officers, one and all, complained of him. (What officers did not?) He was cold; no, he was not—he was ice, very ice; no, he was not—that is too warm an expression for his manner—he was frozen mercury itself, which *BURNS because it is so intensely cold*. That unfortunate frozen manner made the blood boil. He was

<sup>†</sup> That gentleman was my friend, and I entertained for him great respect. He was uncle to Governor Branch, and, besides being a kind hearted, worthy man, was an enlightened physician. But I did not want to see him Surgeon General for all that. He is no more.

It is equally odious in principle and object. It is that which proposes to you to report a bill by which a junior Surgeon might be placed in an office of high pretension, lofty and imposing title, and controlling franchise over the head of his senior, or over the heads of many of his seniors. What jewel is it which is esteemed by officers of any military service, beyond all price, (for their honour and their reputation are its water of crystallization,) a jewel as dearly cherished by medical officers as any others. You know that jewel. As with a diamond its value increases with every carat's weight in the ratio of the squares of that weight, augmenting immensely in value as it rises in weight. So, gentlemen, does the officer's jewel—his RANK rise in value as it ascends by years; Congress has the charge of that jewel. I never can believe that enlightened body would be guilty of a breach of trust, by striking a spark from the diamond. The word *rank* is used in common parlance, as I am sure I need not tell you, to bespeak personal station in the service, in contradistinction to the appropriation of the same term as designating grade. In its personal sense, to which alone these remarks are directed, it simply refers to an officer's relative position as to others of the same grade. His rank by a day, an officer will as vigilantly guard, contend for and maintain, as he would that of a year or ten years. The occasional desperate conflicts for the maintenance of the rights and immunities of seniority, which the history of military service in all countries affords, present the strongest evidence of the tenacity with which men of honourable pride adhere to their rights,—the most convincing proofs that they

---

slow, thoughtful, wary, pondering, imperturbable, obdurate: not without feeling which *responded* to the *right stroke*, from those who had the penetration to see this and the wit to impinge opportunely: with a decision of character that, while it makes him a brave man, transcended the usual limits of decision in the Navy Department and drove him into unyielding obstinacy. All this is his official character, as I estimate it. It was not possible, however, to be half an hour in Governor Branch's company, in his own house with his family, without perceiving the host of strong virtues of private life which adorned his home and endeared him to his family and friends. Such a half hour would make any man respect him, for the unimpassioned but adamant virtues of the gentleman and man of feeling, and inspire admiration of the well tuned cords which so harmoniously gave the tone of general rectitude of character.



repudiate as a stigma or a degradation, whatever may infringe, encroach upon or attenuate it. No man of honour or becoming spirit will fail to exhibit his sense of injury by such invasion. He will jeopard any and every thing, rather than bequeath a name sullied with degradation, to his children. I put it to your own bosoms, gentlemen, and with confidence in the response the feelings which there exist will suggest on this point, and for the course those feelings will point to. That course I am sure will be the right one. It will set aside a principle manifestly subversive of the rights, hallowed in a military service, of seniority.

I have now, gentlemen, analysed this project in all its bearings. In apology for what I am sensible is the diffuseness of this communication, I have to say that, at the moment of receiving, (and for two days after,) information on the 12th inst., of the scheme having been presented to you, with some imposing claims to your notice, I was prevented from writing by the condition of my index or writing finger: and fearing early action on the information you then possessed, I hastened to give you my sentiments as soon as I could write. This I accomplished at an uninterrupted sitting of ten hours, strictly *currente calamo*, with such celerity as left me no power clearly to read what I had written; and in this state sent it six hours after to the press on the 15th inst. Had time been at my disposal, I should have thought the subject of sufficient importance to have claimed a diatribe with that attention to style and perspicuity, which cannot be expected in a composition wholly written (with the exception of the introduction and a few references and trivial additions) between tea time and 4 o'clock of next morning.\*

---

\* Before I conclude, I think this may be an opportune occasion to call your attention to some facts relating to the pay of medical officers and other medical interests of the Navy. I do this simply that the facts may be on record, of the pay affair; and also of other points requiring reform in the Medical Department. Both subjects I trust, will sooner or later be conveniently arranged by the action of your favourable report and the confirmation of Congress. First. When the Pay Bill of 1835, was before Congress, the Surgeons claimed, as pay intrinsically and relatively just,—1200 dollars per annum, with an addition of 200 dollars every five years, until twenty years' commission. Some of the corps (including myself) thought it just that the periodical increase should reach thirty years. I held a correspondence on this subject and the pay, generally, with our representatives. There is not the least doubt, but for an

I have done now my best to promote the interests of the Medical Department of the Navy, for the welfare of which I claim a

---

event I shall presently relate, this pay of \$1200 on being first commissioned, and \$200 pent-annual increase, with the present sea and shore duty and Fleet Surgeon pay, would have carried by a large vote. The bill had been illiberally drafted for \$1000 Surgeon's pay on being first commissioned, and the pent-annual increase of \$200, and it was the remonstrance on this and the petition for \$1200 as first pay, that I say would have, doubtless, been carried by a large vote. I say *illiberally*, because it had been immemorially, up to the year 1828, \$50 per month and two rations per diem, about equal to \$744 per annum—that is within 256 dollars of the drafted increase, viz: \$1000, as it now stands. A Lieutenant has by the same law \$1200 per annum, even if just promoted; and a Surgeon should not, in justice, have less than a Lieutenant. Besides this, it must be here recorded that when \$1000 was acquiesced in as the annual pay of Surgeons by some of themselves, it was contemporaneously with a proposed Lieutenant's pay of the same sum. But in that bill the Lieutenants managed to have the pay advanced to \$1200, and it was on the principle of this augmentation that I held the correspondence alluded to, claiming for Surgeons a like sum, viz: \$1200. This fell-through in the following manner: Just at this juncture the Committee of Lieutenants at Washington, also deeply interested in the bill, and fearful that any delay by discussing the 1200 item claimed by Surgeons, might, and as they said, absolutely would defeat the whole bill, caused a Surgeon at Washington to write to some of the older Surgeons, and induce them, on these grounds, to say they would be, or were, content with the bill as it then stood, of \$1000 as first pay. This was a feeling appeal to the generosity and forbearing self-interest of the Surgeons. Under the full belief that if they did not do as was asked, the whole bill would fall through, they acquiesced, as I then thought and always have thought, most precipitately and unjustly to themselves and their colleagues. But that they did so from good motives is unquestionable. The discussible and delaying obstacle being removed, the bill was passed as it stood, leaving the insufficient pay of \$1000 per annum, and periodical increase with a duty-shore, sea, and Fleet Surgeon's pay. Under these circumstances, ought Surgeons be left with a pay conceded to as sufficient at the time, by a mere conventional coincidence? Their concession to this pay was almost coercive. The facts are now recorded for your information at any time hereafter, and if reflection on the subject shall cause any action, it is but right that it should reach to the establishment of a further pent-annual increase of \$200 at 25, at 30 perhaps at 35 years. The result would be of the suggested increase that the pay of a Surgeon 20 years' com-



zeal I am not willing to yield in intensity, to any medical officer of the service. With apology for intruding the efforts of that zeal on your notice, in the manner I have done in this "Remonstrance,"

I am, gentlemen, individually and collectively,

With respect, your obedient servant,

WILLIAM P. C. BARTON.

*Philadelphia, February 14th, 1838.*

---

mission would be \$2000 per annum, that of one 25 years' standing \$2,200, that of 30 years' standing \$2,400, that of one 35 years' standing \$2,600, with the present increase of shore duty, sea duty, and Fleet Surgeon pay. Are these salaries too large for men of 50, 60, and 70 or 75 years of age with families? They would be competencies to retire on with their families to enjoy a tranquil old age; and if they felt of sufficient strength and physical power to go to sea at these advanced ages, the pay would be liberal enough to support their families at home and themselves abroad. Recollect, gentlemen, that a Surgeon can rise no higher than a Surgeon. It is not "once a captain always a captain," for he may rise to be a commodore, in command of navy yards, stations, fleets, and squadrons, perhaps to be an Admiral. But it is emphatically true, *once a Surgeon always a Surgeon!* 2d. Another point worthy your attention, is a provision of some kind, That a Surgeon of 10 years' commission, as such, shall not serve unless optionally or as Fleet Surgeon in single decked vessels; and 3d, a Surgeon of 25 or 30 years' commission, as such, shall *not be called on* for sea duty; though should he choose, at either of these ages, or beyond the last, to seek sea duty, there should not be any law prohibitory of his acting. 4th. He enjoys no rank whatever, (which he should do,) he can have none of the eclat or power of command, nor the glory of heroism in time of war; nor, be his merit ever so great, can he receive fame or distinction beyond professional competence. In prize money he participates with those who are but indifferently enriched, and sometimes he is treated by his commander with a want of decorum and respect, which he must endure, because it falls short of tangible infraction of the laws and usages of the Navy. Can it be the less galling on that account? But it is not for you to learn now, gentlemen, that a signal exemplification is on record of this unworthy and unofficer-like irruption into his professional and official dominion: as yet unarraigned, and unpunished, but still not too remote for arraignment and punishment. 5th. The place assigned for Assistant and Passed Assistant Surgeons on board ship, requires change for the better: they ought not to live either in the steerage or cockpit.

